

UPDATE

Menopause: What to Expect When Your Body Is Changing

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when her menstruation stops and she can't have children any more. This happens because as a woman ages, her ovaries stop making enough of the female hormones estrogen and progesterone. You may have heard menopause called "the change of life" or even just "the change." Some things you might have heard about menopause aren't true. For example, women don't lose interest in sex because of menopause. Many women feel better with no more periods to worry about. Many women also enjoy sex more without having to worry about pregnancy.

The average age for women to have their last period is about 50. But it's normal for menopause to occur any time from age 41 to 59. A woman often goes through menopause at about the same age as her mother did. Women who have had both ovaries removed will go through menopause early. If the uterus is taken out but the ovaries are left, a woman won't have periods but she won't go through menopause until her ovaries stop making estrogen. Some women have an early menopause without surgery--before age 40--for no obvious reason. If you stop having periods, your doctor can do a simple blood test to see if you're going through menopause. Menopause is a gradual process that can take several years. You're not really through menopause until you haven't had a period for 6 to 12 months. (During this time, keep using birth control if you don't want to become pregnant.)

Common Signs of Menopause

1. *A change in your menstrual cycle*

This is one of the first signs of menopause. You may skip periods or they may occur closer together. Your flow may be lighter or heavier than usual.

2. *Hot flashes*

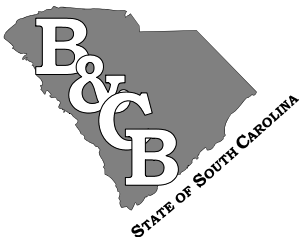
Hot flashes are the most common symptom of menopause. Hot flashes may start before you notice any change in your periods.

3. *Female Reproductive Organs*

The lining of certain reproductive organs becomes thinner with menopause.

4. *Urinary tract problems*

You're more likely to have bladder and urinary tract infections during and after menopause.



**STATE HEALTH PLAN PREVENTION PARTNERS
South Carolina Budget and Control Board
Employee Insurance Program
September 2002**

